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GENDER, UNPAID LABOUR AND ECONOMICS

Abstract. Unpaid labour, including care labour is mostly performed by women. Economic theories explain differences in allocation of time between women and men in various ways – neoclassical theories point to the rational choice associated with the varying efficiency of women and men both in the labour market and in the household, while heterodox theories point to the influence of norms, social values and traditions, according to which the man is the breadwinner and the woman the caregiver. Unpaid labour is often called home duties or responsibilities, and even though it is very difficult, tiring and demanding, it is not valued and respected. The main objective of this paper is to present the importance of unpaid care work in the economy and propose the reconsideration of economic policies.

Keywords and phrases: unpaid labour, care, women, inequality, economic theory

JEL: B5, J7

1. INTRODUCTION

Unpaid labour and care are important sources of comfort and support in people's daily lives. Without this type of labour people would not be able to survive both as individuals, and as society. On one hand, economy is deeply dependent on unpaid labour and care services, and would not be able to develop or operate without them (since the labour force is created and shaped within caring domain). On the other hand, economic relations influence the quantity and quality of unpaid and care labour provided in society. In this regard, it is important to mention that there is a clear differentiation between the sexes when it comes to the amount of time spent on unpaid work, which translates into the women's and men's opportunities.

The problem discussed in the article is the uneven distribution of labour between women and men. The main objective of this paper is to present the explanation of this situation given by two economic theories – mainstream, neoclassical theory, and heterodox, feminist one. Thus the research question posed in the article is, which of the two economic theories – neoclassical or feminist – better explain sources of inequalities in the division of labour between women and men. The hypothesis tested in the article states that neoclassical and

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feminist economic theories explain the uneven division of labour between women and men differently, and the feminist view better captures the sources of this inequality, and importance of unpaid, domestic labour in the economic system. The method used in the article is literature review. The first part of the paper presents the distinction between different types of labour. Then the allocation of time between women and men is presented based on the study of time use surveys in Poland in the year 2013. The following parts of the article are devoted to the relations between women, unpaid labour and economy in the neoclassical and feminist perspectives. This leads to a conclusion that there exists a need to understand the role and importance of unpaid and care labour in economy in order to design policies that would meet people's needs.

2. DIFFERENT TYPES OF LABOUR – PAID, UNPAID AND CARE

The economic concept of work has been formulated within the context of industrial processes (Campillo 2003: 110). In 1800, women whose work consisted largely of caring for their families were considered productive workers. By 1900, they had been formally relegated to the census category of 'dependents', a category that included infants, young children, the sick, and the elderly (Folbre 1991: 464). This change was caused by a shift, in the early years of industrialization, in commodity production from the household to the factory. Combined with a relatively rigid sexual division of labour over domestic activities, it created great confusion over the appropriate roles of men and women¹. In the leading industrial economies, in the second half of the 19c., economic and ideological struggle over these roles resulted in a norm by which only men took paid employment if their households could afford it. Women's activities, necessary to the running of the household, provided no grounds by which they could be measured against the work that men (or other women) did in the paid economy. Earning money became men's work, while women had their own domestic duties, described more frequently in moral rather than instrumental terms (Himmelweit 1995: 7)².

Under such circumstances, work has been defined, both in theory and in conventional statistics, as a paid economic activity linked to the market (Beneria 1999: 288). Conventional economic analysis defines 'work' as paid employment, even though economic life depends on both paid work and on the

¹ To learn more about gender in economic history see Folbre 2009.

² This model of a family life centred on private household-based activity for women was a middle-class ideal adopted by those with sufficient income to be able to dispense with a wife's labour in the family business. By the end of the 19c., it had become an accepted aspiration of the working class family too (Himmelweit 1995: 10).

unpaid activities undertaken in the ‘private’/domestic sector³. Such an approach to work results in a situation in which work conducted by most people for long hours – unpaid and care work – is statistically, economically and politically invisible (Standing 2009). Nevertheless as John Baker et al. write (2009: 30) work is a central fact of human life. It is immensely varied, consisting of all forms of productive activity, whether paid or unpaid and whether in formal economy or not. It includes the work people do in households, voluntary bodies and political organizations. The unpaid domestic sector provides caring services directly to household members, as well as to the wider community, that contribute to individual socialisation and to the production and maintenance of human capabilities, developing ‘the social fabric, the sense of community, civic responsibility and norms that maintain trust, goodwill, and social order’ (Himmelweit 2002, cited by Lynch et al. 2009: 19). Thus the unpaid household work is crucial for the development of economy and society (Hewitson 2003: 266).

Caring can be broadly defined as work that involves looking after the physical, social, psychological, emotional, and developmental needs of one or more people (Standing 2001: 17). ‘Caring’ is an ambiguous notion stretching from physical care, which may, to some extent, be independent of the relation between the carer and the person cared for, to emotional caring, in which the person doing the caring is inseparable from the care given (Standing 2001: 8). The concept of caring labour describes a type of work that requires personal attention, services that are normally provided on a face-to-face or first-name basis⁴ (Badgett, Folbre 1999: 312). In surveys carried out of time used in domestic work, it is often noted how much easier it is to record and categorize than activities such as emotional care and support. In these latter activities, a relationship is involved and who performs the activity becomes part of the activity itself (Himmelweit 1995: 9). Lynch et al. (2009) also notice that caring labour is relational – it entails not only the performance of physical tasks but also the development of a relationship. Insofar as the aim of caring is to develop a particular relationship, it cannot be contracted out to others, therefore many aspects of caring work are non-commodifiable. Nevertheless, care is perceived as work because it requires competence, skill and learning to be done well. It also takes time and effort, and involves stress, due to the fear of failing the care recipient (Lynch et al. 2009)⁵.

³ As Pigou (1932, cited by Lynch et al. 2009 and Beneria 1999) notices, gross domestic product decreases when a man marries his housekeeper. The decrease occurs because, although the household activities of the housekeeper-turned-wife are unchanged, or even increased – the wife is not paid a wage and so, as her work is not for the market, it is not considered economically significant.

⁴ The provider generally learns the first name of the recipient.

⁵ As noticed by Badgett, Folbre (1999) Scandinavian feminists, like Kari Waerness, were the first ones to develop and dwell on the concept of caring labour, emphasizing the ways in which it departs from more traditional economic definitions of work.

3. TIME ALLOCATION BETWEEN PAID AND UNPAID LABOUR IN POLAND

There are different types of work, as it was highlighted in the first part of the article. There is paid employment, unpaid domestic work, as well as care work. Different people perform different types of work, and a division of work depends, among other things, on gender. The division of labour can be studied using time use data. Time use surveys are a theoretical construct used to measure the distribution of time between different types of activities. In Poland, the first attempt to study the time use was made by the Institute of Social Economy in 1927. A post-war nationwide analysis of the distribution of the time, by the Central Statistical Office, took place in 1969⁶ (Hozer-Koćmiel 2010: 72). Subsequent studies were conducted periodically by the CSO in 1976, 1984, 1996, 2003/2004 and in 2013. In case of the Polish study by the Central Statistical Office, information about activities performed during the day is collected by means of a diary, i.e. an official form for the registration of activities performed during the day.

The table below presents data obtained in the study of time use surveys in Poland carried out in the period from 1 January to 31 December 2013 and based on a representative sample of 28 209 households. The survey included people aged 10 years and older, but the results presented in the table include people aged 15 and older. In this analysis, a division was introduced into activities related to performance of paid and unpaid work, and the time spent on these two types of work was disaggregated by sex. In the context of paid work there was a division between main and additional work such as: paid employment, self-employment, and work on a farm. In case of the main job additional activities related to employment were also isolated. In case of unpaid work there was a division into work for the household, and care work. Housework included a number of activities in the home, such as, for example, cooking, cleaning, laundry, construction, and renovation. Care refers to care given to both children and dependent adults.

Data presented in the table above illustrate the problem of uneven allocation of labour between women and men in Poland. There is virtual constancy in the sexual division of unpaid labour in the home. It is predominately women's time that is stretched between paid and unpaid work. The term 'second shift' has been used to describe the phenomena of increasing numbers of women who are income earners, yet at the same time continue to perform their traditional roles as household managers and care providers (Lynch et al. 2009: 19). In Poland men spend more time than women on formal work – both the main job, and

⁶ However, the sample did not represent the entire Polish population as it mainly included the urban population.

additional work, and the proportions are opposite in case of unpaid work (with an exception of help to an adult family member). It is possible to assign a monetary value to this unpaid effort. In case of Poland it is 487.67 PLN for women, and 281.08 PLN for men (CSO 2015: 352). The time use data for men and women presented in the paper show that if you treat work extensively as paid work performed in the labour market or unpaid in the household, women work longer hours than men⁷. Such a division results in a disadvantaged position of women in the labour market. It is therefore worth looking for theoretical explanation of such a situation.

Table 1. Time allocation between women and men (hours and minutes)

| | Total | Women | Men |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|
| Paid work: | 7.38 | 7.02 | 8.03 |
| • Main | 7.42 | 7.06 | 8.07 |
| • second | 3.17 | 3.06 | 3.21 |
| Unpaid work: | 3.46 | 4.33 | 2.48 |
| • Childcare | 2.25 | 2.47 | 1.49 |
| • Help to an adult family member | 1.28 | 1.26 | 1.34 |
| Total | 11.24 | 11.35 | 10.51 |

Source: Central Statistical Office (2015), *Time Use Survey 2013*, Warsaw.

4. WOMEN IN ECONOMY – THE NEOCLASSICAL APPROACH

Both paid as well as unpaid labour are indispensable for individuals, societies, and economies, and the division of labour is gendered, as it was presented in the previous section. Under such circumstances it is interesting to note how economic theory deals with this issue. According to Antonella Picchio (1992), the separation of production and reproduction that took place during the industrial revolution caused the disappearance of any consideration of unpaid labour and care provided by women for households within the framework of macroeconomic analysis. The association of women with unpaid domestic labour and men with the market was one of the factors that caused the devaluation of women's work. Well known neoclassical economists – Arthur Pigou and Alfred Marshall claimed that women's input into the economy, namely their activities undertaken in the household, should not be included in national accounts⁸ (Pujol 1995: 24–27).

⁷ For more regarding time allocation between women and men in Poland see K. Filipowicz, A. Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz 2015; A. Zachorowska-Mazurkiewicz, K. Mroczek 2015.

⁸ Pigou, however, proposed state transfers to those families, who were affected by employment prohibitions and wage policies to the degree that they could not satisfy their basic needs.

Thus, unpaid labour and the allocation of time was not extensively studied by early economists. In the second half of 20th century, there was a turn in this respect due to the emergence of the new home economics. First, representatives of this school tried to analyse the sexual division of labour in the home. This division is largely explained by the comparative advantage model, which argues that marriage provides economic gains to both partners. Households maximize their total bundle of goods and services – those produced in market as well as those produced at home (Becker 1973)⁹. In this way, this approach offers the explanation as to why women specialize in home-based goods and services. Family members specialize in the paid labour market or in domestic labour in accordance with their relative productivities in those sectors. In a household of identical individuals no more than one person will contribute time to both paid labour in the market and household work, the dual contributor being equally productive in the two sectors. To maximize household's output, those who are more productive than the dual contributors in the market sector will specialize there, while those who are more productive in the home will become specialized domestic workers. Constant or increasing returns to scale in the production of household commodities raise the payoff to specialization and each member will specialize in one sector only. To identify who will specialize in the paid labour market, and hence who will be an altruistic head of the household, biological sex must be introduced. Women are defined as having a comparative advantage in household work because of their role in the reproductive process (Hewitson 2003: 269).

In the neoclassical economics the emphasis was put on methodological individualism, rational choice theory and the distinction between the public and private spheres. This helped to explain not only the marginalisation of women's economic contribution but also the neglect of the affective domain (Jochimsen 2003: 232). The most well-known and frequently cited example of a neoclassical model of the family was developed by Gary Becker (1981). His theories of the economics of marriage (Becker 1973, 1974), combined with his theories of time allocation (Becker 1965), form the basis for neoclassical interpretations of the sexual division of labour (Albelda 1997). Becker's model includes the following assumptions (Lynch et al. 2009: 21):

- women are economically dependent,
- the head of the family cares about other family members while they themselves are completely selfish,
- household's decisions depend on total income and it is irrelevant who receives that income,

⁹ Such an approach was widely criticized by feminist economists, like Albelda 1997: 118; Humphries 1998: 226.

– non-market work is classified as leisure, which devaluates the care work carried out within the home and makes it invisible.

In this model marriage is conceptualized as two-persons firm with either member being the ‘entrepreneur’ who ‘hires’ the other (Becker 1974: 11–12). In this interpretation, household contains an altruistic household’s head whose preferences reflect concern with the welfare of the others. This person is wealthy enough to control the intra-family distribution of income. Other members of the family are purely selfish, but rational. They behave altruistically, too, as they have an incentive to consider the welfare of the family as a whole. In this case the intra-family allocation is the one which reflects the altruist’s utility function subject to the family resource constraints (Humphries 1998: 228).

Models discussed above are based on traditional economic assumptions. However, there were more realistic models developed to present the intra-household decision making in neoclassical economics (Humphries 1998), e.g. bargaining models. In such models, like the one developed by Lundberg and Pollack (1993), the concept of gender replaces the biological sex. In this model the bargaining power of each spouse is determined by their well-being in their ‘separate spheres’. This equilibrium is characterized by spouses undertaking the activities assigned to their socially sanctioned and exogenously determined genders – husbands specialize in earning income and wives specialize in domestic labour (Hewitson 2003: 270–271). Another bargaining model using gender is the one developed by Akerlof, Kranton (2000), in which socially sanctioned gender roles are incorporated into the bargaining framework by inserting ‘gender identity’ into the utility functions of the spouses. The relative hours spent by husbands and wives in the performance of paid and unpaid labour is the result of their utility-maximizing strategies to maintain membership of their gender categories. More specifically, both partners suffer loss of utility when the wife works more than half the couple’s total labour market hours or when the husband contributes more than a half the unpaid domestic labour since these situations cause the loss of coherence with the content of their respective gender identities (Akerlof, Kranton 2000). An interesting observation arises from this model. When wives increase their relative hours in the labour market, causing both partners a utility loss due to the incompatibility of this change with their gender identities, husbands reduce their relative domestic labour contribution, creating an offsetting utility gain for each spouse (Hewitson 2003: 271).

The provisioning of caring services is a social as well as an economic issue and it is increasingly difficult for conventional economists to continue to consider caring activities *pre-economic* just because they have been performed in the informal realms of the economy and without pay. Caring services have long left the original realm of their provisioning and are performed in all realms of the economy – in the individual households (families), in the civil society,

in the public sector and constitute an increasing fraction of the market. The integration of caring situations into economic thinking poses the challenge of conceptualizing a situation of human interaction quite different from the typical exchange situation (Jochimsen 2003: 231). Neoclassical economics concentrated on utility maximizing individuals and rational behaviour fails to recognize this.

5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CARE FOR ECONOMY – A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

Division of labour and time allocation are explained differently by one of the heterodox schools of thought – the feminist economics. Feminist economics has been classified as a separate school of economic thought by Seiz (2007), and Foldvary (1996), even though there are researchers who classify it rather as an approach or a perspective (Grapard 1996). Feminist economics challenges orthodox theory for not taking into account gender, aspects of economics dealing with socially as well as biologically determined maleness and femaleness. Feminist economic theory criticizes the implicitly gendered bias of economic theory, like for example neoclassical *homo economicus* for not taking into account the ‘reproductive labour’ of bearing and raising children (Foldvary 1996: 17). Papers written from this perspective take gender relations into account while studying time allocation. In such a perspective distribution of paid and unpaid labour relates to the impact of reproductive life on economic decisions, through the study of the impact of social norms and legal and political institutions. Men and women make choices about how to allocate their time, but according to Sirianni and Negrey (2000: 59) time allocation is shaped by social relations and social inequality. Their choices are considerably constrained by various restrictions and social conditions they encounter, including the institutional environment in which they live (Gálvez-Muñoz, Rodríguez-Monroño, Domínguez-Serrano 2011: 125). Individual choices depend on social expectations, thus adjusting individual behaviour to established social norms (Carrasco, Domínguez 2011: 163). The unequal division of labour between the sexes explains the limited opportunities that are available to women, and their long hours of work when they decide to be active in the formal labour market (Esquivel 2011: 226).

Decisions relating to women’s allocation of time between paid work in the labour market and unpaid in the household have more in common with the beliefs of the society than with rational economic choice. The entrance and participation of women in the labour market and other areas of the economy is dependent on the amount of time spent on unpaid work in the household, including care. Most men do not make such a division of their time. This

inequality limits the ability of women to take up paid employment, reduces labour productivity and reduces the future global output of the economy. The constraints experienced by women in terms of taking on full-time, rewarding work arising from the unequal division of labour in the household are due to the norms and values in the labour market (World Bank 1995: 4).

The labour that has traditionally been associated with women's sphere has been ignored as productive work and has been defined primarily in terms of emotional relationship ('priceless' labour done for love) (Grapard 1996: 109). In this way, as Grapard (1996: 109) notices: "If women's activities are made invisible by the categories and taxonomies that economists develop, it would be surprising if the analysis and actual policy prescriptions following from that framework ended up serving the interests of women or the interests of society very well". According to Maria Floro (1995), any attempt to assess welfare should take into account the length and intensity of the work done by the person concerned. The unpaid work performed by women affects the level of production in the national economy through the reproduction of labour power which takes place every day in households. Reliance on estimates of the total value of marketed output fail to capture important dimensions of women's lived experiences. Conventional statistics obscure the realm of unpaid work, making it easier for policy-makers to ignore the negative effects of cutbacks in public services that affect the provision of care (Folbre 2006: 185).

Feminist economists define economics as a science concerned with 'social provisioning'. Definition of economics as concerned with the realm of provisioning breaks down the usual distinction between 'economic' (primarily market-oriented) activities and policies, and familial or social activities (Nelson 1995). Part of the agenda of feminist economics is to investigate 'value free, politically neutral, gender blind' assumptions and values embedded in the neoclassical paradigm, particularly in those areas that cross the affective domain and bear directly on women's lives and experiences (Lynch et al. 2009: 18).

As a result of those developments care and unpaid labour are increasingly recognized as significant economic issues. At the macro level, they are both important contributors to the economy and practical limits to its growth. At the micro-level the decisions that people make about caring and employment are intertwined, so that no theory of the labour market, nor any labour market policy, can realistically ignore unpaid and caring labour. There is an increasing recognition that such decisions not only have short-term impact on the labour market and the formal economy; they may have even more important long-term implications for the society as a whole, because the quality of care affects the type of workforce an economy can look forward to in the future (Himmelweit 2005).

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Regardless of changes observed in the contemporary labour market, women perform more unpaid work, including care work, than men. Because of women's increased activity in the labour market, such allocation of time disadvantages women. Women work longer than men, yet majority of their work goes unpaid. This unequal distribution of labour has been considered by economists. Neoclassical economists did not consider unpaid work as an economic issue for a long time. This has changed in 20c. with the emergence of new home economics. In this perspective the allocation of time is explained using the notion of comparative advantage that women have in performing unpaid domestic work, including care. This leads to a conclusion that traditional division of labour is beneficial for households, so women make rational decisions to forego income from paid employment and engage more in household. Such an approach concerned with rational choice, and utility maximizing individuals, does not take into account the role of social norms, values and traditions. Different explanation of gender division of labour is provided by feminist economists. According to this perspective decisions made by women reflect values and norms shared by the society that disadvantage women, whose opportunities are limited due to time constraints.

Although the division of labour may in general provide women with opportunities for loving relationships, it has had the effect of excluding women from full participation in the economic, political and cultural systems. It has also had important effects on the position of women within these systems. That leads to a question what to do in order to better allocate time between women and men. The dominant, neoclassical approach delegates this question to households, pointing at benefits for the individual family. In this perspective care and other types of household labour are private problems of particular family, and have to be solved within this family. Feminist approach concentrates on societal benefits and costs arising from existing division of labour, suggesting that unpaid domestic labour as well as care labour should be distributed more equally not only between women and men, but also between all members of society. And because of the latter, it requires active role of the state. The state should regulate and support families in their efforts. One of the possible solutions is to assess the impact of existing policies on the gender division of labour, another is a provision of accessible care institutions, such as nurseries, kindergartens, or care institutions for adults. Thus the change of theoretical approach results in the transfer from private to public sphere.

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RELACJE PŁCI, PRACA NIEODPŁATNA I EKONOMIA

Streszczenie. Praca nieodpłatna, wraz z pracą opiekuńczą, jest wykonywana w większości przez kobiety. Teoria ekonomii wyjaśnia taką alokację czasu pomiędzy kobiety i mężczyzn w różny sposób – teorie neoklasyczne wskazują na racjonalny wybór związany ze zróżnicowaną efektywnością kobiet i mężczyzn na rynku pracy oraz w ramach gospodarstwa domowego, podczas gdy teorie heterodoksyjne skupiają się na wpływie norm, wartości społecznych i tradycji, zgodnie z którymi mężczyźni są żywicielami rodziny, a kobiety opiekunkami. Nieodpłatna praca jest trudna, męcząca i wymagająca, jednak nie zawsze jest szanowana i odpowiednio wyceniana. Głównym celem artykułu jest wykazanie znaczenia nieodpłatnej pracy opiekuńczej dla gospodarki.

Słowa kluczowe: praca nieodpłatna, opieka, kobiety, nierówności, teoria ekonomii

JEL: B5, J7